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For the Small Arms Conference

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SMALL ARMS TRADE

Small Arms – generally considered to be those that can be carried and fired by one person – are responsible for 300,000 to 500,000 deaths a year. To deal with such a major worldwide issue, the United Nations is sponsoring an International Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in all its Aspects, to take place in July at the United Nations Headquarters in July 2001. In this edition of **World Chronicle,** Ambassador Carlos dos Santos, who is the Chairman of the Preparatory Committee for the Small Arms Conference, discusses some of the issues to be addressed in this ground-breaking conference.

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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues.

Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

The Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects has recently completed its third and final session at United Nations Headquarters in New York. The Conference itself will be held in New York next July, and will address the pressing need to end the human suffering caused by the proliferation of small weapons while, at the same time, preserving the sovereign right of States to safeguard their national security.

Our guest today is the Chairman of the Preparatory Committee for the Small Arms Conference. He is Mozambique Ambassador to the United Nations, Carlos dos Santos. Joining me to talk with Ambassador dos Santos are James Wurst of *InterPress Service* and James Bone of *The Times of London*.

Ambassador dos Santos, welcome to World Chronicle.

DOS SANTOS: Thank you.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador, the Department of Public Information produced a very interesting documentary on the subject and the title really tells it all – "Armed to the Teeth" – and it deserves the widest possible distribution. In fact, some of the people associated with this programme were also involved in the production. But it seems to me that the seriousness of the problem is not sufficiently well known. You almost never read about it in the newspapers and I don't recall very considerable coverage of the Preparatory Committee or of the upcoming conference. What can be done to address more attention to what the Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, has called "one of the gravest threats to international peace and security in the new millennium"? A grave threat that people seem to be closing their eyes to.

DOS SANTOS: Yes. I believe this is the beginning of the opening of the eyes actually of public opinion because we have spoken here at the UN about disarmament, about conventional weapons ...

LITTLEJOHNS: And nuclear weapons also...

DOS SANTOS: And nuclear weapons, of course. But we have not spoken very much about small arms and now we have begun to speak about small arms in the last five years.

And this is the very first conference on small arms and light weapons and I believe that the conference itself will be a moment to raise the profile and awareness about the scourge of small arms. There are initiatives being undertaken to raise the profile of the issue even before the Conference. You will have heard of the initiative of Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, from the United Kingdom about the Small Arms Surrender Fund. The Netherlands ...

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm sorry. What? Small arms what?

DOS SANTOS: Surrender Fund. The idea being that we create a fund at the UN to allow people who want to surrender illicit small arms, they do so to appropriate authorities.

LITTLEJOHNS: So you hand in the small arms and you get compensation or something?

DOS SANTOS: Exactly. You get some form of compensation. This is being done in some countries and some regions and the idea is to bring it to the international fora for all countries that are affected to do that.

LITTLEJOHNS: And where would the money come from?

DOS SANTOS: That's the idea. The UK is bringing up the idea. I'm sure the government of the United Kingdom would put up some money but the idea is that this is supported globally and we believe that kind of initiative does raise the profile.

LITTLEJOHNS: But I read in the documentation for this programme that part of the problem is that the weapons that have been surrendered in previous situations like this have been ancient, beat up, rusty old things and the real good stuff is kept in reserve and not surrendered. Isn't that going to be a big problem?

DOS SANTOS: It is. The intention of the conference is to solve exactly that problem and to make sure that the arms that are surrendered to the authorities are the ones that are causing instability throughout the world in regions of conflict. And by making sure that there is appropriate control of those arms that are legally held, then you make sure that there is little diversion of those arms that are in illegal hands. That's the main objective of the conference – to deal with this illicit part. But in order to deal with the illicit part you need to create the appropriate controls and management of stocks and make sure that the arms that are handed in are definitely the good ones as well, as you said.

WURST: You've touched on a lot of the problems here. In the Preparatory Meeting before the conference, there was a lot of talk about political declaration, political

will, etcetera, etcetera, but not so much about any sort of legal commitments, any sort of treaty negotiations or any sort of regulation on how the small arms problems can be controlled. Do you anticipate the conference coming out with -- obviously they can't negotiate a treaty in two weeks but a mandate to begin negotiation of a treaty say on controlling arms brokers or something along those lines? Is the conference going to lead to something concrete that would relieve the suffering that you've been describing?

DOS SANTOS: I think the conference should be judged by what political commitment we can get from governments throughout the world and this is one thing that has to be understood that in terms of small arms, we have to get the commitment of all countries because it takes only one or two countries to unravel every other effort which is undertaken at the global level. If we can get a political commitment of all leaders that they want to seriously deal with this issue, then the negotiation of treaties for specific areas like brokering, like tracking and marking of weapons can be dealt with, as is the case for instance with marking, which is being dealt with in another forum in Vienna where they are negotiating a legally binding instrument, or they have negotiated actually a legally binding instrument on marking.

LITTLEJOHNS: What do you mean by marking, Ambassador?

DOS SANTOS: It's the marking of weapons so that they can be identified and traced to their origin and the route that it follows.

LITTLEJOHNS: You stamp them or....

DOS SANTOS: A kind of stamp. It has a different kind of marking. That's what they call marking, so that it can be traced.

WURST: What good would that do? You could trace a weapon so what.

DOS SANTOS: So that we can identify – for instance if that weapon ends up in illegal hands then you know who supplied the weapon in the first instance, where it went from the supplier to the recipient, who was the broker in the middle and where it was deviated from the end-user who was registered in the documents. Because there is legal trade of small arms and in a legal trade you're supposed to sell from a legal seller to a legal buyer and when these arms or these small weapons – small arms – goes into the hands of illegal people, that means something happened here. And when you have a weapon marked you want to trace from the origin to the end where was the deviation and that's what you want

to try and stop. If it was an illegal broker or a broker who works legally but didn't follow the rules, then he should be taken to justice and he should follow what is supposed to be done in terms of trade. And I think those who are doing legal brokering would like all their peers to do this as a legal business.

BONE: Ambassador, you are from Mozambique. You are the Chairman of the Preparatory Committee. Is it a coincidence that you are from Mozambique cause Mozambique, obviously in the past, had a terrible problem with a very disorderly rebel movement? Were you chosen because your country has some experience of the dangers of small arms or was that just coincidental?

DOS SANTOS: Definitely it's not a coincidence. It's exactly what you said.

BONE: How was it in your country? What impact did small arms have on your country?

DOS SANTOS: As you know, Mozambique has gone through many years of war for the liberation struggle for about ten years and then another sixteen years of destabilization from outside the internal conflict. And that meant that many weapons were hidden in the bushes, many weapons went into illegal hands and that required from government strenuous efforts because when we had the United Nations operation in Mozambique, we had some collection and some disarmament of weapons, but we knew that many weapons were hidden in the bush, many were still in illegal hands. So the government of Mozambique did try to do something within its means to deal with this problem and some governments came to assist and the government of South Africa actually was one that worked with Mozambique, and continues to actually, in an operation called "Operation Rachel" which is shown in the video that Michael referred to earlier on. And this operation has been dismantling actually hideouts of weapons from the war of destabilization that was in the country.

BONE: So during the war in Mozambique where were the weapons coming from and would what you are doing now make it easier for a country that faces a similar situation to stop those kinds of flows of weapons in the future?

DOS SANTOS: Yes. The weapons came initially from places like South Africa, apartheid South Africa, and many other places and what is happening is that some of these weapons are actually finding their way back into South Africa and other markets in the

region. And these are illegal markets because they don't follow the normal circuits of trade of small arms and light weapons. And what we're doing now we believe will help not only Mozambique but the entire region of Southern Africa and the African continent as a whole.

WURST: Okay, now, we've got this same point as the specific issues in Mozambique, South Africa and Operation Rachel: the surrender of weapons and the problem that the weapons are often the worst ones. Then on the flip side you've got this programme that was started in a central region of Albania that rather than a one-to-one, a person-to-person exchange of weapons it was the community turning in weapons and the community getting something in return – a telephone system, professional training for the police force, etcetera. Do you see more of that sort of thing, that kind of model being effective to really get rid of what you all refer to as surplus weapons? Do you see that model being applicable to other parts of the world?

DOS SANTOS: It could be. It depends really on each situation. Each situation has its own specificities. Some of the things that you're mentioning about Albania may be more or less like the ones that we have in Mozambique. The Mozambican Christian Council is working on a programme of exchange of weapons for instruments for instance; working instruments like sewing machines and other tools for production. The idea being that those who have weapons may find that exchanging them for tools for production can go into civilian life and productive life and be useful to society. This has been successful in Mozambique, as was the programme in Albania. But I'm told it's not so successful in other places because you create a vicious cycle of exchange and then again going into the same route of illegal possession and then trying to get more of what it's being exchanged for. So it depends on each specific situation.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is **World Chronicle**. Our guest is Ambassador Carlos dos Santos, Chairman of the Preparatory Committee for the Small Arms Conference.

BONE: Ambassador, one thing I'm wondering about is how much the end of the Cold War has increased the problem of small arms. Obviously, during the Cold War there was lots of proxy wars fought and the various protagonists were supplying their own armies but it seems to me that since the collapse of the Soviet bloc, a lot of the economies there that were big weapons producers that were really militaristic kind of states, have had to make hard currency and they've started flooding the world market. I mean we have seen

the UN reports on countries like Ukraine and Bulgaria accused of exporting small arms sometimes, which were later diverted to rebel movements for instance. What role did the end of the Cold War play in the whole thing?

DOS SANTOS: I think you are right. There's a negative impact of the end of the Cold War in that sense that many of the weapons that were kept in that bloc --- if you want the Eastern bloc of Europe now need to find markets. They need to sell those weapons. Some of them actually are considered obsolete but they are still being sold in many conflicts in Africa and the rebel movements just want to get weapons. They will pay small amounts of money to get the weapons that they need.

BONE: And what about China? I mean China has also become a big producer and exporter of weapons and when you go to these places, often the Chinese Kalashnikov is preferred to the Russian Kalashnikov.

DOS SANTOS: Well, there are many producers of small arms and light weapons in the world and I wouldn't want to pinpoint countries at this stage.

BONE: But which is the biggest exporter of small arms – illicit small arms? Do you know?

DOS SANTOS: Well, I don't know for sure. There are many numbers and statistics and I wouldn't want to say that this is the biggest producer. We know there are groups of countries that produce a lot and I think the important point here is really to see that all of them – all the countries that produce and many of the countries like my own, Mozambique, that are affected – are getting together into a conference to try and settle at least the illegal part of this trade in small arms. And if you look at the documents that we are working on, we have a lot of recommendations for measures which have to do very much with legal trade but in as far as they are linked to illicit trade it is to prevent, to combat and to eradicate illicit trade in small arms and light weapons.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador, I guess the United States is probably the largest legal producer of small arms what position has the United States delegation taken in your Committee? Have they been on the whole supportive of the whole idea of coming up with an international agreement?

DOS SANTOS: Yes. Like all the countries that participate in the Preparatory Committee, the United States has been very cooperative in trying to get consensus on

measures that need to be taken. Of course, the US, like all other countries, is very cautious not to infringe or to interfere into domestic legislation and domestic procedures of countries. But what we are trying to achieve here is what can be done at the regional, national and global levels so that we can have a united and common understanding of what needs to be done and be able to implement that because it doesn't help to try and force an outcome of the conference which will not be implemented by all. As indicated at the beginning of our talk, it is important that all countries are on board because it takes only one to unravel the efforts of all.

LITTLEJOHNS: Preparations for UN conferences don't always go very well. An example is the recent discussions for the upcoming Conference on Racism and Racial Discrimination in Durban, South Africa, where there have been a lot of differences. Would you say that by and large your committee has made good progress?

DOS SANTOS: Definitely. I'm very optimistic about this process and I think it was a successful process considering the delicate nature of the issue at hand. The issue of small arms has to do with the security, defence of countries. For many countries in the world small arms and light weapons are the only means that they have to defend their sovereignty, to maintain law and order in their countries. So they look at this issue with a great sense of responsibility and it is a sensitive issue. They don't want too much interference on what they can do in terms of defending themselves in terms of their security needs, but it is clear they are prepared to work together with others to deal with the illegal part of this problem. And I think we have had an excellent Preparatory Committee. We did what Resolution 5454(V), which is the number of the resolution which created the PrepCom, and gave it a mandate. We have done all which was requested of us which was to propose an agenda for the conference, to propose an outcome which is the draft Programme of Action which we have worked on. We have proposed draft rules of procedure, we have proposed the election of a president from Colombia -- and two other countries will have substantive roles, namely Japan and the United Kingdom -- and we have also recommended that this conference be held at ministerial level. We hope to see Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Ministers of Defence, Ministers of Home Affairs coming to New York for this conference. We have had an excellent discussion actually on the draft Programme of Action which I believe will attract ministers to come to New York because they can see that it is possible to

build consensus around a specific set of measures that can be undertaken. And this should be seen as a beginning of a process, not the end. And I think this conference was relatively well prepared to ensure the success of the conference itself.

LITTLEJOHNS: Well, Ambassador, it sounds as if you deserve congratulations for a job well done.

DOS SANTOS: Thank you. Thank you very much.

WURST: I'd like to draw some of these points together including changes you put in a minute ago about government involvement in illegal arms transfers. Again, the idea of some sort of legal regime that would actually help relieve the suffering of the victims here. Now what could you, you the Member States, do to regulate the transfer, sale, production of arms, not only by private gunrunners that you know we both hear about, but also governments that supply weapons? There was one expert here at the PrepCom who said that by his estimate it would take three days for a gun purchased legally in one country to end up illegally in a war zone in Africa or Asia.

DOS SANTOS: How long? Three weeks?

WURST: Three days.

DOS SANTOS: Three days!!!

WURST: Three days. It could be simply done as easy as that and personally I suspect that from Florida to Colombia it would probably be even shorter. But given that, what can you really do in any sort of legal regime to relieve the suffering of the people who are at the wrong end of these weapons?

DOS SANTOS: Well, I think that's exactly what we are trying to do at the level of the United Nations and we are actually building on something that countries, regions and sub-regions have been doing already. So we are not starting afresh. You know that in the Latin American, and actually this region of the Americas, there's already adopted an Inter-American Convention. The Southern African Region has been working on a protocol. It has adopted a declaration at the summit level of that regional organization, the Southern African Development Community. Other sub-regions in Africa, like the Eastern African Region and the Horn of Africa, ECOWAS have adopted moratoria. The European Union has codes of conduct. We are trying to build on those to see what should be done at the national level, what should be done at the sub-regional and regional level and what we can do at the

global level. So the Conference will not be concerned only about what should be done at the global level. It's all these levels. And if you look at the draft Programme of Action, it sets out a number of measures to deal with management of stocks, management of supplies, surplus weapons. It deals with the destruction of surplus weapons. It deals with marking and tracing; all these things. Some of them can be done at national levels, others can be done at regional levels and others can actually be done at international level.

BONE: Ambassador, I just want to ask a very simple question, which is when is a small arm too big to be a small arm? I mean there's a Stinger missile you can put on your shoulders. Is that a small arm? Is an anti-tank missile a small arm?

DOS SANTOS: That is the issue of definition of small arms. We are working at the level of the PrepCom under the assumption that the definition we are using is one which was approved by the first panel of governmental experts on small arms and light weapons and they identified small arms as those that can be used by one person like rifles and things like that. Pistols.

BONE: There are some sophisticated things one person can use. For instance a Stinger missile is a one-person weapon, is that a small arm?

DOS SANTOS: Again, it's a definition that the PrepCom did not want to dwell upon and I believe Stinger missiles were not included in the Panel's report and as such is not included as a small arm. But there is a long list of weapons that are considered small arms and light weapons.

BONE: So there's actually a list. I see.

DOS SANTOS: Yes.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador, that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle.** Our guest has been Ambassador Carlos dos Santos, Chairman of the Preparatory Committee for the Small Arms Conference. He was interviewed by James Wurst of *InterPress Service* and James Bone of *The Times of London.*

I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle**.

ANNOUNCER: Transcripts of the programme may be obtained free of charge by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to **World Chronicle**, United Nations, Room S-827L, New York, N.Y., 10017.

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